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PRESENT CONDITION, TASKS OF COAL MINING IN HUNGARY

The following lecture was delivered by Ferenc Mayer, mining engineer, on 8 July 1951 at the coal production meeting held by the Mining Section of the Mining and Metallurgical Association.

During 1950, Hungary's coal-production plan was fulfilled 105 percent and coal output showed a gain of 12 percent compared with 1949. This gain is unsatisfactory in comparison to the 85-percent increase shown by industry as a whole. Since 1950, coal mining has contended with increasing difficulties in attempting to satisfy a rapidly increasing demand as the effective mobilization of manpower quickened the pace of industrialization. Due to the progress of industry, 1951 coal requirements total 16 million tons, or slightly over 20 percent more than the 1950 coal production. As we approach the second half of the year it appears opportune to review the past 6 months, to obtain a clearer view of the current problems as well as of the work to be done during the next 6 months.

During the first half of 1951, coal production for the country as a whole was only 96.9 percent of plan figures, showing a shortage of 240,000 tons. This shortage was aggravated by two factors. Eighty-five percent of the shortage was due to the deficiency of five mines, with nearly half of the shortage resulting from the deficiency of a single enterprise, namely, Tatabanya. The bulk of the shortage was due to absenteeism and malingering as well as to the unusually large number of workers who failed to fulfill their individual quotas. During the first half of 1951, absenteeism was close to 3.5 percent, resulting in a shortage of 2,000 tons of coal for the country as a whole.

Without exception coal-mine managers are unanimous in blaming the manpower shortage for the nonfulfillment of production quotas. Although it is true that manpower in the coal mines is approximately 5.5 percent short of plan requirements, this shortage cannot be accepted as a valid excuse so long as 60 out of every 100 mine workers produce less than their full norms and output as a whole shows a downward trend.

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The task is to increase coal production during the second half of 1951 sufficiently to make up for the shortage of the first half of the year. In other words, 16 million tons of coal must be produced this year and each mine must deliver its full quota. What are the available means and how should they be used to fulfill the plan? In the opinion of many mining enterprises, besides elimination of the manpower shortage, large-scale investments are the only method for meeting plan quotas. No one knows better than the ministry how urgent investments in coal mining are and the ministry is extending support in this field in all justified cases.

The principal problem, however, concerns the use which the mines are making of such assistance. One glance at the investment balance sheet for the first half year shows conclusively that even investment projects which were to be carried out by the coal mines were delayed, and that the delay in the execution of such projects was not due to the nondelivery of equipment by other enterprises. Investment projects for mining operations by the Tatabanya, Dorog, Diosgyor, Szuhavolgy, and Zagyva mines within their own jurisdiction were lagging 10 to 27 percent. Smaller backlogs also exist in other mines, although all these investments were, without exception, designed for development purposes.

The situation is more difficult where the mines must depend on deliveries from other enterprises. However, most mines follow the line of least resistance. For example, at a preliminary discussion concerning the opening of a new shaft at Tatabanya, the mine director declared that the building enterprise would be unable to put up the most necessary buildings; nevertheless, 2 days later, after a telephone conversation between the ministry and the building enterprise, the enterprise accepted the contract with a relatively high priority.

In general, many mine directors take the attitude that things are difficult and that nothing can be done about the difficulties. It might be a good idea to find out who are the inspirers of this dangerously passive attitude. The majority of the coal miners are surely different from the director of the Vertes-Bakony coal mine, who is supposedly a Communist, who announced that he would leave the mine because the situation was too difficult for him.

The task of this meeting is to discuss ways and means to solve the foregoing problems. It is the business of this committee to indicate what means can be used most quickly and effectively, and to ascertain where it will be necessary to call on higher authority for help.

First, I wish to discuss the problem of machinery. This year approximately 100 new-type excavators and mechanical cutters will be made available to coal mining. Most of these are F-4 type excavators and cutting and loading machines followed by the Szeman steam shovel, the Szeman-Kummer-Torok cutters, and other machinery. Most of the workers are waiting for these machines because they will eliminate heavy physical labor and increase output. Nevertheless, some of the mine directors are reluctant to install the machines. Strangely, the Dorog coal mine, which has a particularly important task to fulfill, has protested against the introduction of the Ajtav-Szilard machine. Dorog, like all other coal mines, knows approximately how many machines it will receive and at what time. Nevertheless, instead of making preparations, the management is engaged in endless arguments as to whether it would be more advantageous to carry the coal from the machines in hand trucks or by meas of a conveyer belt.

Dorog is not alone in this respect, since Ajka and other mines belong in the same category. I did not intend to take up the question of machinery from the viewpoint of investment at this point. However, it must be discussed, since we all realize that without the necessary preparations and technical adjustments a machine will never become the means for fulfilling the plan. The problem of obtaining the machine does not concern the mine. On the other hand, it is definitely the duty of the mine to make technological preparations for the introduction of the machine.

STAT

Technology is a concept which has not taken its proper place in coal mining as yet. Many people believe that technology means the manufacture of machines or other industrial processes and deprecate the significance of technology as a scientific method in the field of mining. Technology is actually nothing but the proper application of production methods and means. Thus, cyclical mining is also a step toward better mining technology.

If we take a look at Buchnev's recently published work, The Mining Engineer's Handbook, which, we hope, is being read diligently by our technicians, we will find many tables containing norms for various operations and brigades, as well as for loading and related work. All this is part of mining technology.

In connection with mechanization, the prime duty of mining specialists is to work out the technology of the shafts to be mechanized and of the cycles to be introduced. The problem should not be what type conveyer will be used in connection with a F-4 machine, since either hand trucks or conveyer belts are practicable. The main task is to prepare the shafts as well as the technical prerequisites of mechanization. It is probable that in some cases a technical reorganization will become necessary. For example, scraper tubs must be concentrated in the mechanized shafts, while hand trucks must be employed in other shafts. These preparations must be completed speedily due to the unusually high production demands of the next 6 months.

Another means of meeting production schedules is the introduction of innovations and inventions. Although not an innovation in the accepted sense of the work, mill-second blasting may be mentioned in this connection. In mines where light-weight loading machinery which is now being manufactured is to be installed, or loading is still performed by hand, the new blasting technique must be introduced immediately in all shafts free from mine damp. The ministry expects particularly good production results from this technique.

Innovations developed by miners are largely ignored by management. The innovation movement must be directed much better than it has been. The majority of innovations still come unsolicited from the rank and file, instead of resulting from a well-defined program given to the miners by the technical management. Many clear-cut problems exist in the mines and most of them have been planned superficially. As a result, the second half-year plans submitted to the miners include problems whose solution will tax even our research institutes and planning agencies. At the same time, the Kisterenye coal mine requested the miners to submit innovations to prevent the loss of screws in reassembling chute tubs. Neglect and proper care cannot be stopped by innovations, but must be dealt with by the managements.

Dorog would like to find a solution for the grooving of pit props. The operation is, of course, necessary; however, a machine for grooving supporting timber has been in existence for some time. The machine was designed at the Petofi coal mines, has been tested in actual operation, was shown at a mining exhibition, and is now being manufactured by the Dorog Machine Works and Repair Shop.

The ingenuity and energy of our innovators should not be diverted by similar problems. The technical managements should concentrate on problems whose solution will increase production. Our miners' long experience and sound instinct for what is practical should not be used to discover variations in a truck brake, but should be directed toward clearing up unsolved problems of organization and operation and of the more effective utilization of machinery.

STAT

It is hard to understand why our technical cadres fail to devote their attention to questions of organization. Blinded by their surroundings, they are unaware of the most crying needs. This seems to be the only reason why large-scale well-considered reorganization of workers and equipment is extremely rare. Neglect of overdue reorganization is largely due to the fact that personal inspection of the mines by the technical managers is superficial. The manager usually spends a few minutes at a time in the shaft and gives but perfunctory attention to operations. At best he will check on safety provisions and make inquiries as to the fulfillment of the daily quota.

To relieve the technical managers, we have repeatedly advocated the appointment of reliable shaft chiefs. However, most mines have ignored this order. From a few personal reports we know that at least 20-25 percent of the technical manager's time is spent in the performance of nontechnical duties; thus he has little time left for the personal supervision of operations.

A study of Soviet literature leads to the conclusion that the problem of organization is the central point of weakness in coal mining everywhere, and the improvements in this field have resulted in some cases in increases of 10-30 percent in production. The initiative of the ministry has not always met with due interest and many companies still close their eyes to the latent possibilities of work organization or hidden reserves. Thus, Tatabanya, Dorog, Disogyor, and other coal mines lagging in plan fulfillment have openly disparaged cyclical mining and even today are showing complete indifference toward its practical application.

The managements of these mines have not yet grasped the principle of cyclical mining and of production planning, and working time is wasted. Norms are established for the loading of a certain number of hand trucks. After the quantity in question has been delivered, usually 1-1½ hours are lost, although the miners are required to continue working the entire shift. Mining specialists and executives must realize that no lasting increase in production is possible without the cyclical method and good production planning.

In his article published in the May 1951 issue of Banyaszati Lapok (Mining Journal) Janos Sztraka, in effect, comes to the conclusion that better planning will not increase output. This view proves that our mining engineers have not grasped the significance of planning. Yet planning is the basis on which work competition and the Stakhanovite movement will give far better results. Cyclical mining is expected to boost coal output at least 20-25 percent during the next 6 months and the ministry is counting on this increase.

Another means of stepping up production is the wider use of stripping systems suitable for mass production. The mechanized room-and-pillar and longwall systems deserve primary consideration. In the development and introduction of stripping systems, the number of worth-while innovations is very small. The longwall method is employed at Kisterenye. Here, on a seam 55 centimeters thick production has been increased from 1.8 tons to 2.8 tons per shift through the use of a mechanical cutter.

The 180-meter longwall workings at Ormospuszta and longwall workings in the Kondo, Petofi, and other mines may also be mentioned. On the other hand, in many places blunders were committed which resulted in loss of coal and in accidents. For example, at Ozd the longwall method was employed improperly.

It is not a question of the longwall method at all costs. The problem is whether the management has examined every possibility for introducing the more productive longwall system or whether it gave up all efforts simply because the Bamert C-type scraper (which is known to be the largest and heaviest of the three scraper types made by Bamert) does not fit into the pit. The alternative

is whether the longwall method, which produces 20 percent more than the room-and-pillar method, should be discontinued, or whether the smaller A-type scraper should be put to work instead of the C-type.

The situation is much the same at Diosgyor where, due to unscientific management, the roof caved in over a length of 20 meters. Here the accident was caused by improper spacing of the props. These events by no means disprove the suitability of the longwall method at Diosgyor; they merely indicate incompetence. If, after such experiences, the technical manager and shaft foremen are not making a concerted effort to run the operations properly but are engaged in personal arguments, then it is small wonder that inimical elements among the miners spread propaganda against the longwall system of operations.

In many cases, good examples may be found nearby and need only to be imitated; however, progress is held up by the absence of initiative. A portion of the Tatabanya mine is also worked by the room-and-pillar method and sometimes the chambers reach a height of 4 meters. As a result many problems arise, partly due to imperfect drainage and partly from the viewpoint of safety. Here the logical thing to do would be to work 8-9 meter thick portions of the seam in three or four sections instead of in two. I could give a long list of similar examples, but the cases cited will suffice to show that technical initiative is rare in this field.

The Stripping Committee (Frontfejtesi Bizottsag), composed of experts of the Coal Mining Division of the ministry and of the Mining Research Institute, performed valuable service when it prepared a map of the whole country, showing where better operating methods could be introduced. The committee has worked out a series of extremely valuable proposals. The proposals were, however, adopted by only a few mines and then not in their entirety. The committee received no cooperation whatever from Tatabanya, the colliery which still uses the most old-fashioned methods and is noted for underproduction.

In conclusion I wish to speak of work discipline, a lack of which has had extremely harmful effects on output. The managements adopted the practice of writing letters to the families of habitual absentees, pointing out the financial losses which the worker has incurred by his absence from work. In most places these letters bring the desired results. However, one of the shaft foremen at Dorog does not have the courage to write such letters, because he is afraid of the men. This shows that discipline, as well as initiative, is not one of the outstanding traits of our managements and foremen.

A committee of eight inspecting one of the longwall workings at the Baross mine included the representative of the ministry, the director of the enterprise, the technical manager, and the shaft foreman. After they had passed one of the recesses someone called out that the fuses had been lit to set off four charges of dynamite and the explosion followed in 30 seconds. All the committee could do was duck behind the pillars. Later it developed that after lighting the fuses the two miners who had been working the chamber left it by way of an air shaft without giving warning to the transportation crews. Since the director of the enterprise was present, he could have taken disciplinary action immediately. Instead, he ordered an investigation by a "triangular" committee composed of representatives of the management, the party, and the trade union, and the whole matter was dragged out inconclusively.

What is this if not sloppy work and disregard for discipline? What do these and other examples show but that the mine directors and technicians are quick to complain about the lack of manpower and discipline, while they do practically nothing to combat these conditions? In some instances this situation is practically

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equivalent to working for the enemy. Why do our mine managers and technicians continue carrying two heavy handicaps on their shoulders -- the lack of technical initiative and the failure to impose discipline? We feel that these two factors are the primary obstacles to progress and we wish to free the rank and file of our coal miners from these two handicaps. We have enough coal to fulfill the plan quotas and we have the equipment to insure increased production. However, the fact that leadership is absent in some places should not be concealed.

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